
Introduced by Senator Cogdill

March 13, 2008

Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 93—Relative to William Saroyan Year.

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL’S DIGEST

SCR 93, as introduced, Cogdill. William Saroyan Year.

This measure would designate the year 2008 as the William Saroyan Year for enriching the cultural diversity of the state, and in particular, for celebrating over 100 years of the cultural contribution of Armenian Americans to the people of the state.

Fiscal committee: no.

- 1 WHEREAS, William Saroyan was born in Fresno in 1908.
2 Saroyan was the fourth child of Armenian immigrants. He
3 embraced his culture’s distinctive qualities as an inspiration to his
4 writing. Saroyan’s cultural celebration was most notably apparent
5 in his 1940 story, “My Name Is Aram.” This book exemplifies the
6 life and times of the California central valley during the mid-20th
7 century; and
8 WHEREAS, Saroyan died from cancer on May 18,1981, in
9 Fresno at the age of 72, about a mile from where he was born. His
10 lasting words to the press in the face of the inevitable were,
11 “Everybody has got to die ... but I have always believed an
12 exception would be made in my case.” Half of his ashes were
13 buried in the Ararat Cemetery in Fresno and the remaining was
14 interred in Yerevan, Armenia; and
15 WHEREAS, Published in 1943, Saroyan’s novel, “The Human
16 Comedy,” was adapted for the silver screen, starring Mickey

1 Rooney. The film received five Oscar nominations, and won
2 Saroyan the award for Best Writing Original Screen Story; and
3 WHEREAS, Based on an Armenian folk tune, Saroyan co-wrote
4 “Come On-a My House,” along with his cousin Ross Bagdasarian.
5 It was the song that catapulted the career of Rosemary Clooney;
6 and

7 WHEREAS, Saroyan was among the most famous American
8 writers of the 1930s and 1940s, and has over 4,000 literary works
9 to his credit, beginning in the late 1920s to the early 1980s, and
10 has long been established as one of America’s most gifted and
11 influential writers. At one time, the Armenian American writer
12 was mentioned in the same breath as Ernest Hemingway and John
13 Steinbeck; and

14 WHEREAS, Saroyan was the first American writer to win both
15 the New York Drama Critic’s Circle Award and the Pulitzer Prize
16 for his play, “The Time of Your Life” (1939); and

17 WHEREAS, Saroyan’s theatrical works continue to be
18 performed today at prominent theatrical venues, including New
19 York’s Broadway stages, the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, and
20 local theaters throughout the United States; and

21 WHEREAS, Saroyan, a humanitarian, wrote extensively about
22 his concern for humanity. Excerpts include: “If I have any desire
23 at all, it is to show the brotherhood of man.” “In the time of your
24 life, live - so that in that wondrous time you shall not add to the
25 misery and sorrow of the world, but shall smile to the infinite
26 variety and mystery of it.” “Seek goodness everywhere, and when
27 it is found, bring it out of its hiding place and let it be free and
28 unashamed.” “It is the heart of man that I am trying to imply in
29 this work. I see life as one life at one time, so many millions
30 simultaneously, all over the earth.” “Encourage virtue in whatever
31 heart it may have been driven into secrecy and sorrow by the shame
32 and terror of the world”; and

33 WHEREAS, Saroyan’s corpus of total artistic work includes
34 plays, novels, short stories, musical lyrics, drawings, and paintings;
35 and

36 WHEREAS, Over 40 organizations throughout the state have
37 come together to celebrate the 100th birthday anniversary of the
38 acclaimed author and playwright with lectures, theatrical
39 performances, art exhibitions, and writing contests; and

1 WHEREAS, While Saroyan’s writing in general is particularly
2 renowned among fellow Armenians, “The Armenian and the
3 Armenian” is an especially stirring declaration of solidarity. The
4 piece is set during the Armenian Genocide, in which over
5 1,500,000 Armenians were killed. The words evoke notes of grief,
6 rage, resilience, and rebirth, in relation to Armenian cultural and
7 social life. A famous excerpt reads: “I should like to see any power
8 of the world destroy this race, this small tribe of unimportant
9 people, whose wars have all been fought and lost, whose structures
10 have crumbled, literature is unread, music is unheard, and prayers
11 are no more answered. Go ahead, destroy Armenia. See if you can
12 do it. Send them into the desert without bread or water. Burn their
13 homes and churches. Then see if they will not laugh, sing and pray
14 again. For when two of them meet anywhere in the world, see if
15 they will not create a New Armenia”; now, therefore, be it

16 *Resolved by the Senate of the State of California, the Assembly*
17 *thereof concurring*, That the Legislature designates the year 2008
18 as the William Saroyan Year for enriching the cultural diversity
19 of the state, and in particular, for celebrating over 100 years of the
20 cultural contribution of Armenian Americans to the people of the
21 state; and be it further

22 *Resolved*, That the Secretary of the Senate transmit copies of
23 this resolution to the author for appropriate distribution.